The White Comrade

ROBERT HAVEN SCHAUFFLER

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THE WHITE COMRADE AND OTHER POEMS

The White Comrade
And Other Poems

By Robert Haven Schauffler

Author of "Scum o' the Earth, and Other Poems," etc.

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TO

MARGARET WIDDEMER SCHAUFFLER

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FOREWORD

THE courtesy of the following publications, in which have appeared poems included in this volume, is gratefully acknowledged: *The Atlantic Monthly, The Century, The Outlook, Collier's, Contemporary Verse, The Touchstone, The Youth's Companion, The Smart Set, The Plattsburger, The American Poetry Magazine, The Stratford Journal, The Lyric, The New York Evening Sun,* and *The Boston Evening Transcript.*

The idea of the title poem was suggested by an anonymous clipping, which was long afterwards traced to "The Comrade in White," written on the western front by W. H. Leatham.

The poem called "To Sleep" is the first result of a search for more flexibility in the sonnet form. I had long wondered why the more rapid and elastic triple beat might not be as well suited to the sonnet as the conventional double beat. Experiment showed that this triple beat, by adding too many syllables, made the time-honored five-stress line unwieldy. But it de-

veloped that a four-stress line in triple beat averaged nearly the same number of syllables (ranging from eight to twelve) as the immemorial iambic pentameter. A sonnet in this triple beat, four-stress measure, however, will *seem* considerably shorter than one in the Petrarchan measure, because the triple beat induces a more rapid reading tempo.

R. H. S.

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I
BETWEEN TWO SHORES

THE WHITE COMRADE

Under our curtain of fire,
Over the clotted clods,
We charged, to be withered, to reel
And despairingly wheel
When the signal bade us retire
From the terrible odds.

As we ebbed with the battle-tide,
Fingers of red-hot steel
Suddenly closed on my side.
I fell, and began to pray.
I crawled on my hands and lay
Where a shallow crater yawned wide;
Then, — I swooned. . . .

When I woke it still was day.
Fierce was the pain of my wound;
Yet I saw it was death to stir,
For fifty paces away

Their trenches were.
In torture I prayed for the dark
And the stealthy step of my friend
Who, staunch to the very end,
Would creep to the danger-zone
And offer his life as a mark
To save my own.

Night fell. I heard his tread, —
Not stealthy, but firm and serene,
As if my comrade's head
Were lifted far from that scene
Of passion and pain and dread;
As if my comrade's heart
In carnage had no part;
As if my comrade's feet
Were set on some radiant street
Such as no darkness could haunt;
As if my comrade's eyes
No deluge of flame could surprise,
No death and destruction daunt,
No red-beaked bird dismay,
Nor sight of decay.

Then, in the bursting shells' dim light,
I saw he was clad in white.
For a moment I thought that I saw the smock
Of some shepherd in search of his flock.
Alert were the enemy, too,
And their bullets flew
Straight at a mark no bullet could fail;
For the seeker was tall and his robe was bright;
But he did not flee nor quail.
Instead, with unhurrying stride,
He came,
Still as the white star low in the west,
And gathering my tall frame,
Like a child to his breast. . . .

Again I slept; — and awoke
From a blissful dream
In a cave by a stream.
My silent comrade had bound my side.
No pain now was mine, but a wish that I spoke, —
A mastering wish to serve this man
Who had ventured through hell my doom to revoke,
As only the truest of comrades can.

I begged him to tell me how best I might aid him,
And urgently prayed him
Never to leave me, whatever betide;
When I saw he was hurt —
Shot through the hands that were clasped in prayer!
Then, as the dark drops gathered there
And fell in the dirt,
The wounds of my friend
Seemed to me such as no man might bear;
Those bullet-holes in the patient hands
Seemed to transcend
All horrors that ever these war-drenched lands
Had known or would know till the mad world's end.
Then suddenly I was aware
That his feet had been wounded, too,
And dimming the white of his side
A dull stain grew.
"You are hurt, White Comrade!" I cried.
Already his words I foreknew:
"*These are old wounds,*" said he,
"*But of late they have troubled me.*'

THE SUPREME GIFT

You brought and gave the infinite
To me who had despaired of it;
Beloved, how shall I express
The fervor of my thankfulness?

For love is higher than my sight
And deeper than my ken;
For love is as a final light
To long endungeoned men;
Such rapture as if there should come
A gush of song to lips long dumb;
The sound of far celestial mirth
To those whose ears were sealed on earth.

WORSHIP

(To Margaret)

Of late this was the loftiest word I knew
  To tell my worship of your body's grace,
  Your eyes where love and laughter interlace
And where the gorgeous mind comes flashing through; —
My worship when the soul's transcendent hue,
  Through irised windows, turns your lovelier face
  Shrine-like into the God-head's dwelling place: —
"Next to my love for God is mine for you."

Thus yesterday; but now, since your white hand
Has led me upward to the promised land
  Of this world's highest heaven, from this world's hell,
Through ways more dazzling than my sight may stand, —
  Dearest, I love you more than prayer can tell, —
  He were a saint who loved his God so well.

THE HARMONIES OF HEAVEN

LET me but hear the harmonies of Heaven, —
  Straightway life grows more free and large and wise,
The loaf of earth is leavened with a leaven
  That lifts the brutish mass nearer the skies;
Straightway my power is as the power of seven, —
  Such potency within that music lies.

All that the venturer for art's rare booty
  Dreams at the height of his most dizzy dream;
All that the seer, on his lone vigil's duty,
  Recaptures from the glories of the gleam, —
Appear, against that harmony's broad beauty,
  Soiled wreaths of spume on some bright ocean-stream.

Grant me to keep the pulse of that far singing,
  O Thou who marshalest the choiring throng;
Leave ever in my soul the mellow ringing
  Of timeless harmony, serene and strong,
That time may bear me on broad pinions winging
  To where these songless lips are touched with song.

DIVERS

Clad in thick mail he stumbles down the floor
  Of the dark primeval ocean; — on his head
  A casque more gross than ever helmeted
Crusader against Saracen. Before
His glass-dimmed eyes dart shapes like fiends of yore,
  Or like malignant spirits of the dead,
  To snatch and snap the line where through is fed
A meager air to that strange visitor.
Stumbling we grope and stifle here below
  In the gross garb of this too cumbering flesh,
    And draw such hard-won breaths as may be drawn,
Until, perchance with pearls, we rise and go
  To doff our diver's mail and taste the fresh,
    The generous winds of the eternal dawn.

THE BROKEN WINDOW

In my ignorant days, in my witless years,
I peeped at life through a window of fears
That distorted the world like an ill-wrought pane
Clouded with bubbles and flawed in grain; —
Such glass as had warped for my childhood's eyes
The work-a-day street when the dusk came down
On the smoke-drenched town,
Where I watched through the window, in awed surprise,
The dog turn dragon, the corner post
Writhe to the shape of a headless ghost.

My best-loved comrade's parting breath
Haunted my ears as, alone with death,
I gazed with dread, through my window of fears,
Down the stair-like descent of my ageing years.
And I was aware that shapes of despair
Lurked for me there on each grim stair,
With coals to banish from out these eyes
Faces and books and the red dawn's rise;

With poniards ground fine to pierce the ears
That had caught the pulse of the choiring spheres;
With a rack whereon they would bind me to lie
Powerless, half human, unable to die
Till the stair should crumble away for my fall
To the jaws of the bottomless pit under all.

With frantic eyes I sought egress;
My spirit thirsted for nothingness;
But suddenly, as I faced despair,
My best-loved comrade was with me there.
He met each test of my skeptic wit
With glad assurance, and conquered it.

"Comrade," he breathed, "fright holds you now;
There is dread in your eyes and damp on your brow.
You have peeped through a clouded window of fears;
Gaze now at life with a sight that enspheres
All the woes of earth, as they verily are,
With the life of the soul in the outermost star.
Look through my eyes!"

I looked, and lo! —
With a crash like the splash of the cursed

Who should plunge in a crystalline pool,
Healing, delicious and cool,
To slake an unbearable thirst —
My window of fears was burst
By the force of an unseen blow;
And, lo!
The long, dark stairway of human woe
No more than a fleck of soot, became,
Brushed from the wick of a primal flame,
For his heel to spurn who has newly trod
Through dusk to a great dawn lit by the same,
When his feet shall spring on the flower-starred sod
Of the uplands of vision and power,
With no term set to beatitude's hour.

Then I knew that the death of a well-loved friend,
Or the death of this well-loved frame,
In very truth became
No bottomless pit of flame, —
No ignominious end, —
No death; —
But the first, long, shuddering breath
That the new man draws, whose frame

Escapes from its black duress
To the breast of a mother's tenderness, —
To the kiss of the wind
And the magic of mind,
And the myriad beauties to which he was blind.

Then I knew why Jeanne d'Arc sang as the fire
Crackled below her martyr's pyre;
For her window of fears, accursed, —
Her clouded pane, had burst;
And still, as the world went dark,
That searing vision could see
Earth as one cooling spark
From a sun of eternity.

Nay, even the sight of a world at strife,
Blasted and horror-torn,
Seen now, from the height of the endless life,
Appeared as the blood-drenched morn
Of a cosmic savior's birth,
Who should open the eyes of the sphere
To visions more radiant and clear,
More thrilling and wonder-worth: —

To the wisdom, the beauty, the laughter
Of the fairest ways of the here
And the all-transcending hereafter.

My brow grew serene,
My vision, keen.
Now I saw that nothing may harm that man
Who carries the torch of his soul,
As only the constant can,
Unquenched to its ultimate goal.
Now I knew that my comrade, at last, I knew,
And my soul could envision him through and through.
Swifter than fear I flashed through space,
And communed with the Infinite face to face.

. . . . . .

I homed to the sphere of the slow-grinding hours,
To the travail, the terror, the pain
Of humanity's dim-eyed reign.
I put off my Heavenly powers;
Yet did I carry with me
Sight that forever shall see
Whatever things mortal there be
From the height of eternity.

And ever there ring in my ear
The tones of a high command:

"Be strong to raise thy hand
To the windows whence mortals peer
Palsied by terror, insane.
Strike with thy might and main!
Let in my air again!
Drive forth the phantom, fear!
Shatter the clouded pane!"

THE WONDERFUL HOUR

I RAMBLED alone in the marsh;
The clouds hung forbidding and harsh;
The ruts of the mean road bristled below
Their tatters of slushy snow.
Ebbing trickles of salt creek spread
Sad, colorless, dull as lead.
The brightness had fallen from the grass,
And the sparkle had flown from the bay;
No beauty nor cheer were left, alas!
Trusty nature had failed me to-day;
Her heartening word remained unspoken;
I thought her inviolate tryst was broken.

Suddenly dawned the wonderful hour.
My gate swung wide for the only good;
My hands reached forth for the only food;
I drank deep breaths of the primal power,
And the tides of my being began to glow
Like westerly surf when the sun is low.

My casements flew open that I might see
The magic, the worth and the mystery
Of runnel and sedge and gaunt-limbed tree.

From my work-a-day wrappings of murky cloud
I burst, as a man who should wake in his shroud
Might burst through the ring of the sorrowing crowd.
My plod grew buoyant, my vision, keen;
The slush was glossed with a silver sheen.
Though the swords of the sun could not slash through,
Each puddle was dreaming of turquoise blue.
Transmuted to amber the wet ruts lay,
And the mean marsh road was a royal way.

THE BROKEN GLOBE

When they had broken our Dorothy's globe, —
  The battered old ball of green and blue
That she loved so well; when the hot tears gushed
  And her poor little heart seemed broken, too,
    We took the child to a fairy play,
    And wonder enchanted her grief away.

O, God, if they shatter this globe we love
  And spurn it aside as a ruined toy, —
Shall we crouch and whimper disconsolate,
  Bewailing our vanished hour of joy? —
    Or, hand in Thy hand at eternity's play,
    Forget the disasters of yesterday?

A SOUL REMEMBERS

Once, in my moment of Earth,
Before the immortal rebirth,
I looked on my flesh as a thing
Like to the house of a king, —
Beautiful, worthy to stand
Proud on the heavenly strand.

I remember it now as a clod
Prone in the gardens of God,
Mean, without honor or beauty,
Justified but by the duty
Of spending its pittance of power
In rearing a heavenly flower.

II
MAGIC CASEMENTS

HIDDEN TREASURE

(For George Gray Barnard's Cloisters on Washington Heights, New York City)

EMBEDDED deep in the unlovely walls
Of hovel and enclosure, pen and byre,
These lovely shards of the old abbey halls
And towers lay hidden: —
Statue and plinth and subtly planed lunette,
Rare capital, incomparable tomb, —
Concealed like sapphires caked in mire,
Or pearls shell-ridden.

Forgot they lay, oblivious of their doom,
While generations, star-like, rose and set, —
More like us men, perhaps, than we know yet,
Who, in a whorl of worlds whose vision chokes
the breath,
Drowse on through time, mistaking life for death.

Then came a man with vision to divine
The treasures in the wall.

He drew them forth and built of them a shrine
Where all
Might play their destined part,
And each long-hidden shard of loveliness
Express,
With individual art,
The myriad oneness that is beauty's heart.

Now what great hand shall delve into the wall
That crusts our mortal frame's immortal mind,
And rear therefrom a shrine our God may call
The temple of mankind?

TO BROWNING, THE MUSIC MASTER

Oh, I once was a lad
Of a single thought,
Melody-mad,
With ears for nought
But the miracles Bach and Beethoven wrought,
When suddenly you,
Out of the blue,
With your formal old master Galuppi, dropped,
And grim-eyed Hugues
Of the mountainous fugues,
And the rampired walls of the marvelous Abt, —
To build me, from Music's far-off strand,
A way to a humaner, dearer shore —
A bridge to poetry-land.

Then to my soul I swore:
"If poets may win such store
Of music's own highland air,

Yet abide in the common round,
Transmuting man's dusty ground
To gems for the world to wear —
Theirs too is a priceless art, —
Is a thing that I fain would share —
A thing that is near to my heart!"

Thus were a young soul's ears unstopped
By Galuppi and Hugues and the marvelous Abt,
Who bridged a way for ignorant feet
And parted wide for wondering eyes
The port of a second paradise;
Showing how right it is, and meet
That a Schubert's voice may never repeat,
With the self-same thought and the self-same beat,
Measures a Milton's lips have dropped; —
That music waxes where poesy wanes,
And, with thirsty lips to poesy's veins,
Grows by her want, by her wasting, gains.

For music, the protean, is this, and this:
The rainbow shimmer of love's first bliss,

A despairing gesture, a dream-like whim,
The down on the plumes of the Cherubim,
The body of Ariel, lissom and fresh —
Too subtle for poesy's golden mesh —
An exquisite, evanescent shape
That "breaks through language" to escape
To the bourne of that country, brighter, vaster,
Where now you are singing, dear Music Master.

INTERLUDE

In the brown, cheerless land of Brain,
As I sat scribbling rhymes in vain

And dumbly sought to sing my dream,
The pencil slipped into a stream

Whose lyric voice unheeded rose
Antiphonally to my prose.

Long did I follow down the shore
This graphic guide, that evermore

Wrote on the rocks its fluent story
Or danced with eddies, dilatory,

Until it led me where the stream
Grew lovelier than my brightest dream,

With irised falls and pavement stones
Glazed in a myriad liquid tones

Rarer than day's triumphal dome
Is hung with when Lord Sun turns home.

For very joy I had to sing. . . .
The pencil ceased from voyaging.

A SPELL FOR LISTENERS

When music sounds, fling wide the spirit's door
  And hearken what the heavenly choirs can do
  To reinforce Earth's halting art for you,
And with their notes round out its barren score.
Then gloriously upon the ear shall pour
  The larger song, while the old strain you knew
  Drones like a child's toy pipe, scarce piercing through
Chords vaster than Niagara's primal roar.
No power of Bach's or Palestrina's pen
Ever may fully body forth to men
  What music through his soul's wide portal throngs; —
  Such blessedness unto no man belongs!
And our mortality may sound again
  Mere shattered fragments of the song of songs.

FROM THE SPIRE OF MILAN CATHEDRAL

SHROUDED in grey
The city lay,
And the fog and the gargoyles were friends that
day
When high in the spire I took my stand,
And scanned
The dull panorama for signs of fabled Switzerland.

Lashes of vapor veiled the sun-god's glance,
Thick as doubt and grey as ignorance.
But — suddenly —
Apollo shook his bright head free;
And now there glowed, in a world new-born,
Monte Rosa and Matterhorn,
And now haze-curtains of saffron and rose, —
Turning their prose
To poetry —
From Viso and Bernard and Blanc were torn.

And I thought how the mists of my morning had melted
away
When maturity looked with the eyes of the day,
And I pondered what ultimate ranges the noon might
disclose,
That still remained shrouded in grey.

THE SHADOW OF ASPIRATION

My summit calls. Its floors are shod
With rainbows laughing up to God.

But oh, the jagged ways and bleak
That give upon that lonely peak!

WORDS AND MUSIC

Poems are dewberries picked in a dream;
Music bedecks them with sugar and cream.
The result is a succulent savor, —
But where is the dewberry flavor?

TO THE PAINT-BRUSH POETS

Although you may loudly protest
  That the poet should write with a palette
  Or hammer his pen with a mallet, —
Chisel and brush are best
    For faithfully showing the look
    Of a man or a beast or a brook.

Are you cramped by the poet's own themes?
  His boundaries are wide as the ocean:
  The surge of great passions in motion,
Thought's lightning, the white surf of dreams,
    Why shun them, for novelty's look,
    To splash in an alien brook?

THE TRYST

'Long about dusk I'd see him go
Almost a-runnin' through the snow
Bound for the marsh, like a feller who's late
Meetin' some girl, you know, — keepin' a "date."
"Jest like them dudes," thinks I, "to roam
With girls in the marsh, and their wives to home!"

So, one fine day, I on with my hood
And follered his tracks to the edge o' the wood
Where the marsh begins, to see who it was
Meetin' my neighbor's man, — because
I liked Mis' Joyce, — and she oughter know
O' the goin's-on out there in the snow!

Well, what do you s'pose I saw? — Instead er
A girl, there wa'n't nothin' but common salt meader,
And him on the bridge pacin' up and down
Watchin' the grasses float and drown
In the flood o' the tide, and the cakes of ice
Swim up westward. He looked so nice,

And pleased and content, it seemed like he
Was findin' himself rare company;
And never once did he turn his head
From the west, to look for a skirt instead.

I sneaked back home by the pasture lane,
And studied and puzzled and addled my brain
To guess why he hurried so, only to stand
And gape at the west with his hat in his hand.

Next mornin' says I to my neighbor: "Say,
Why does your man allus hurry that way
Past my house, the end of the day?"
Says she: "To look at the sunset, dear,
Out where there's nothing to interfere."
Says I: "Now ain't you city folks queer!
What's in a sunset for to see?"
"Look for yourself, my dear," says she.

So, late that day, I thought for to look
Out o' the winder near where I cook.
The sky was a nice red birthday cake
Spattered with candles.

Mercy's sake!
I dropped the cutter; I dropped the dough,
I stood there gapin' outdoors as though
One o' them fairy tales was true,
And I was a princess with nothin' to do
But watch a girl sewin' with silver thread
On pink satin curtains to hang 'round my bed.

I hurried across and opened the door;
Never seed nothin' so purty afore!
Then, under my eyes, things turned to a dome
O' melting gold, like a honey-comb.
Some bee must 'a' come from that fairy hive
And stung me, and made me feel all alive. . . .

Funny what tricks yer eyes will play
If any one happens to show 'em the way!

HURDY-GURDY

"Harmony belongs exclusively to the most civilized nations of modern times."
GROVE'S *Dictionary of Music*

MEAN you strike on our ears with the tin-pan yawp of
your treble,
Mean with the blat of your bass, your vulgar, monotonous droning,
Otherwise, far, had you struck the fresher ears of the
ancients,
Sons of the age of gold, the children of Pericles' Athens,
Ranged in their theater intent while the pipes played
the notes of the Ajax,
Harmonyless and thin, skirling the barren Greek music
As country lads pipe in the Spring crudely on whistles
of willow.

How had they started and stared as the wealth of your
harmonies neared them,
Crowded and craned for a glimpse, oblivious now of the
Ajax, —

Trooped from the benches to meet this marvel the gods had invented, —
Eyed it with such surprise as if the moon's sickle of silver
Abruptly had burst into flames of purple and orange and scarlet.
How each actor had stripped the mask from his face to see better,
While Athens bowed in the dust to worship this wonder of wonders!

Commonplace land of our love, vulgar and crass and provincial,
You of the tin-pan yawp and the jerry-built slums and the bill-boards, —
What wonders, what beauties are yours, were our senses but fresh to perceive them!

OVER-TONES

Poet, lift up your voice!
Not alone to yourself do you owe it
To spend to the full in the worship of beauty
Your body and spirit and mind;
You owe it to legions of mute, inglorious singers, —
Singers you never behold, but who join you in song
By grace of the mystical converse
That quickens the fronds of your mind
In the soundless waves of the songs of the souls of men,
Torn whence —
All arts must perish like sea-flowers cast on the shore.

For, enlarging, enriching each note of the voice
That brings you the honor which brightens your name,
Ring over-tones not of your making, —
Unheard by the conscious ear,
But thrillingly plain to the all-perceiving unconscious.
Round and mellow they ring, sonorous with pleasure,
Like hunting-horns heard far

Over the floor of a dawn-flushed lake,
Or vibrant with passion,
Bubbling with laughter,
Poignant and shudderingly sweet with the stirrings of
love,
Or muffled by pain;
Over-tones richly enveined with the gold of unsatisfied
longing,
Strong as the prayer of the savior who dies for his friend,
Pure as the cry of the soul when a rending of veils
Discloses the heavenly city.

THE SILENT SINGERS

(With Margaret Widdemer Schauffler)

FAMELESS and unfulfilled
  Lie prisoned your silent throng,
Far from the proud who build
  Tower, statue and song:

Great souls destined to lie
  Shackled by circumstance,
Walled from your rightful sky,
  From your own stars' glance.

O Miltons of letterless dream,
  Rembrandts with pictures undrawn,
Bachs who may echo no theme
  From the choirs of the dawn;

Hail! craftsman and driver and drudge,
  Mariner, sower of grain,
Whose mute souls cry to your Judge
  And seem crying in vain:

Yet are you building, though still
  You dream that your lives are naught,
For the thoughts of your strong souls thrill
  Through the builders' thought.

And back of the singing pen
  And back of the building hand
Are the urging souls of the men
  Of your fameless band!

III
CONFLICT

WORLDS AT WAR

In the uproar and stench
Of a Verdun trench —
The tortured bed of the great war's birth —
I slept, and dreamed this vision of Earth:

Out of the bosom of Europe the slaughter had spread
Till the waves of the distant Yang-tze-kiang flowed red;
Red were Columbia, Amazon, Ganges, Nile;
Red were the uttermost peak and the outermost isle.
No part of the planet, from shore to remotest shore,
But agonized now in the bestial clutch of war.
From every ocean, from every tribe and state,
Rose up to the stars the fetid odor of hate.

Then I saw in my dream how the sun was suddenly
veiled
By the wings of a monstrous, ghoulish fleet of the air,—
Unhuman ships from another world, that hailed
From none knew where;

And, hard on the heels of thought,
From their trenches poured the embattled folk of
the world,
With battle-flags furled,
And, with cries of good-will,
Sprang forth to embrace,
Those whom, the moment before, in that charnel-
like place,
They had lusted to kill.

And I felt the great thrill
Of the throe
Of an earth
In re-birth,
That moment while hand sought hand
Across the wires of every No-Man's land, —
While foe took foe to his heart,
And, never to part,
Turned, shoulder by shoulder to parry the blow
Of the grim Earth-foe.

Then first, since the bulk of the dripping sphere
Heaved shuddering out of the slime
Of chaos and night and old time,

Were the hearts of all earth-men strung
In harmony one with the other.
Then faded and vanished the last frontier
Of hate, when the soul's universal tongue
Uttered the great word: "Brother!"

There, in that infinite spark of time,
Despite the ghoul-fleets veiling the sky,
Was my heart lifted high;
For I heard a mighty resurgent chime,
And I knew Earth's death-in-life was done,
And I saw from its grave-like trench, humanity
climb
Into the light of a common sun.

. . . . . .

Out of that dream I awoke.
On the borders of night, serenely far,
Unmenacing glimmered the evening star.
No ghoulish air-fleets blotted the blue.
The dew of the dusk was sweet;
But the voice of an enemy mortar spoke,
And my comrade fell at my feet
With his skull split through. . . .

Then in my soul I prayed
To the wise All-Father, and said:
"God, if no merciful plan
May reconcile man to man,
Then raise thine omnipotent arm;
Blacken our skies with the woe
Of some all-menacing harm;
That, awed by a common foe
And a common fate,
Our hearts may shatter the gate
From the narrower self, and advance to unity
dedicate."

Then shall our triumph ring
Whether we stand or fall;
For the wreck of the flesh is a paltry thing,
But love is all in all.

EARTH'S EASTER

MCMXVI

Earth has gone up from its Gethsemane,
  And now on Golgotha is crucified;
  The spear is twisted in the tortured side;
The thorny crown still works its cruelty.
Hark! while the victim suffers on the tree,
  There sound through starry spaces, far and wide,
  Such words as in the last despair are cried:
"My God! my God! Thou hast forsaken me!"

But when earth's members from the cross are drawn,
And all we love into the grave is gone,
  This hope shall be a spark within the gloom:
That, in the glow of some stupendous dawn,
  We may go forth to find, where lilies bloom,
  Two angels bright before an empty tomb.

MEUSE-ARGONNE LYRICS

I

FEAR OF FEAR

Only one thing I feared,
  And it was this:
That when the day appeared
  My soul might miss
That scorn of death and anguish whence
It drew its quiet confidence.

I minded nothing now
  But the misgiving
That I might grow, somehow,
  Too bent on living.
I feared my confidence might fail
When gas and shrapnel told their tale.

Daily that shameful doubt
  Made my cheek blench
Until the Hun wiped out
  Our starting trench.

Then, in the hell of shell and shot,
I knew the fear of fear was not.

II

BEST O' LUCK

OVER the top we swarmed.
Solid as slush was the air with the stuff their guns sent by;
With shrapnel, gas, bullet and bomb we were handily warmed,
But a jubilant man was I.

Gone was my fear of fear;
Come were the steadfast and tried to help on the dubious way;
The souls of the living and dead, the loyal and dear,
Marched with my soul that day.

One of them shouldered my pack;
One pointed his hand at a bough where a sniper was making too free;
And when I grew thirsty, another, divining my lack,
Held wine out to me.

Around me they closed in a crowd.
They bore me along with a rush that it seemed no weapon might stop;
The confident souls that I loved bore my flesh through the fight like a cloud
The day I went over the top.

III

THE LOOK IN THEIR EYES

YOUTHFUL and buoyant and blithe they went into battle,
Fresh as Olympian athletes strung for the prize;
Aged and broken and done they dragged from the victory,
All with that look, that terrible look in their eyes.

Plainly I saw in their eyes the plunge of the bayonet,
Plainly the crater's fresh red, and the faint, over-wise
Smile on a comrade's cold lips and his blackening body
Were mirrored once more by the terrible look in their eyes.

Never again shall they greet, with youth's poignant
pleasure,
Forests or tremulous dawns or the round moon's rise,
Or beauty or grandeur or love or the glory of heaven
Who return with the mark of the knowledge of hell in
their eyes.

IV

DELIRIUM?

I HAVE heard wise men say
That all the armies wasting earth to-day
Are but the meager counterparts
Of those invisible hosts of Day and Night
Whose spirit-warfare's unimagined arts
Throughout high Heaven, above man's lesser fight,
Sweep their relentless way.

Of what avail to win our victory,
To cleanse this home of Earth
Where, at the next re-birth,
Our tenancy will soon have ceased, —
If the pure Heaven where we shall ever be
Lies ravished by the Beast?

Then, comrades, while we burrow in the earth,
Or charge with earthly blade
Across the No-Man's hell that man has made,
On towards the glimmering dawn of freedom's birth,
Forget we not to swing our spirit's sword
Within the ranks above that battle for the Lord!

V

HIT

A CRACK and a zip!
I went to the ground
As if my hip
Had been caught in the path of a leaden bat
Which a demon batsman was whirling around
In the throes of some inter-stellar game.
I struggled to rise, but my side was aflame;
And I felt ashamed I had come to that.
My first thought was that it could not be
Me they had hit, — who was going scot free —
Me!

My next thought carried me back with a whirr
To a distant place and a distant day,

And sharply showed me an old dead-beat,
Pinned so flat that he could not stir,
Under a trolley in lower Broadway,
With one foot off, and his face in the street; —
A shameful way for a man to lie,
For one of our human clan to die,
Flat in the mud where he could n't writhe free!
And the same
Old shame
I had felt for him
And his severed limb,
Rose for myself in me; —
Shame for my plight as if I were
Pinioned there like a fox in a trap,
Or a felon strapped to the murderer's chair,
Blind in the cap.

But, after that
Emotional riot
Had simmered to quiet —
Though the German bird
In the tree, who had shot me,
Kept trying to pot me,

And bullets spat
In the ground
All around, —
I pledge you my word:
Not another emotion
For months on end
Did fortune allot me, —
Not even a feeling of decent devotion
To that true friend
Who had crawled to my side
And dragged me to cover.

Like a pierced balloon, emotion went down.
No more could I glow like a friend or a lover.
The demons and gods I had cherished:
Compassion, hope, envy and pride,
Faith, reverence, thirst for renown,
Hate, loyalty, — all
The passions that make the heart wide,
The passions that make the heart small, —
Had been hit, every one,
By that sniper's gun,
And had perished.

When the war was done
I could scarcely rejoice
Or savor the sweets
Of the reveling, joy-drunk Paris streets.
I could barely find voice to curse at the Hun.
Emotion was dead.

Nor could I feel any jubilant thread
Strung white-hot from my heart to my head
When I waited on deck that dazzling day
And the crowded transport swung up the bay,
And we startled the streets of the milky way
As we cheered the girl with the silver torch
Who lights the path to America's porch.

Thus I lived like one in a trance,
Drawing dull breath
In a living death,
Until one day in a well-loved town,
As I stood in my old college hall again
And saw the seniors in cap and gown,
Bronzed young veterans back from France,
Sightless, some, or with empty sleeve,

Back once more
With laurels from No-Man's Land, to weave
In the laurel crown of the Mother of Men, —
Come out of horrors they could not tell
To offer their Mother a new renown
And to say "Farewell!" —
Gilding her name with a fresh romance
Snatched out of hell; —
Then the organ spoke and the young men sang
"*The Son of God goes forth to war.*"
Poignant and deep through the vaulting rang —
Filled with the youth of that "chosen band": —
"*Who follows in His train?*"

Then, — why, I shall never understand —
Some note borne on that strong refrain
Paid to my heart its long arrears;
Red dawn flooded my frozen brain;
And hot in my eyes lay the gift of tears.

THE DAY OF A THOUSAND DEATHS

Calamity loomed in the way;
My lips went suddenly grey,
For his sword was long
And his armor strong.
"No sword nor armor are mine," I said,
"I am but as the dead!"
But a thousand deaths I died that day
As waiting Calamity's blow I lay.

Calamity came and lifted my head.
"I am no coward," he proudly said,
"That would slink to attack
A defenseless back!
I am not Worry, the cur whose bark
Slays fools in the dark.
Not so; I fight as a well-born knight;
Nor shall you fail of the chivalrous right
To equal weapons and equal mail";
When, lo! my body was girt in steel
And a blade in my hand was bright.

Then did I feel
A tenfold might.
With a tenfold zeal
Then did I fight.
Then did I fall
With courage alight.
Deep and grievous my wounds were, all;
But none in the back, and fatal, none.
Already my confident flesh had begun,
As the clean-cutting steel withdrew, to heal.
And the pain was as naught to the pain I had
felt that day
When blindly awaiting Calamity's blow I lay.

BEFORE THE DELUGE

WHISPERS of hoarse, far thunder;
  The splash of a drop here and there;
Faces upturned in mild wonder
  Whether the day will turn fair:

. . . . . .

Lord of flood, famine and plunder —
  Speak! are we late, too late
    In this dusk of our weal
    To lay us the keel
  Of the ark of a deathless state?

When the beaches of foam crawl higher,
  And we climb through the murk and the roar,
When the cries of spent swimmers draw nigher,
  And our mountain-top holds us no more;
Then, Wielder of deluge and fire,
  Shall we cry to Thee late, too late,
    O Lord of our weal,
    To lay us the keel
  Of the ark of a death-doomed state?

THE CRUCIBLE

Turning aside from her golden foes
And her red, whose ranks her ranks oppose,
Flushed with the promise of happier things,
Fronting the future, America sings:

"Chemist of morrows am I,
Here in my crucible lie
Stuffs of the proudest worth
Fused with the bloom of a new-found earth.

"Oh, rare is the stuff of creation that waits re-birth
At the touch of my quickening art!
These atoms were warmed in Tolstoy's heart, —
These, in the chalice of Shakespeare's brain;
These drops, behold! once ebbed from the cheek
Of the loved apostle when Heaven's smile
Gilded the main
And lit the hushed beach of Patmos Isle.
To the mind of Beethoven this seed is heir;

Here's blood that danced in the ageless Greek
When his spirit was blithe
At the Parthenon's brow, as he filleted there
Sculptures whose adamant youth should dull the
implacable scythe.
Such drops to my crucible flow
From the veins of time's deathless men;
And, what blood has accomplished, lo!
Blood shall accomplish again.

"Nay, in my crucible's glow
Shall it accomplish yet more;
Beauty and strength it shall know,
Fairer, more potent, than bore
Fire to its current before: —
Beauty of cavern and island
New to the ancient world;
Grandeur of prairie and canyon and highland,
Glory of floods from the glacial sky-land
Suddenly down to the summer hurled.
And splendors unseen it shall know,
Of hope for democracy's way,
Of faith in unity's powers,

Of trust that out of these calyx hours
Shall blossom the perfect day.

"Lo! here to my hand are the seeds of the monarchs
of time;
Lo! here to my hand, new wonders of earth and mere,
And a far-eyed faith in freedom's millennial year.
Now each, as I pair it with other in fusing rhyme,
Shall utter a strain attuned to the Pleiades' song, —
A strain for the men of loftier morrows to hear,
On purer heights of the soul, in a happier throng.

"With the seed of the bards who were Britain's boast
Shall I mingle the lure of my Georgian coast?

"Oh, Scottish heather
And English broom
And the rich, rank Irish bog;
Halcyon weather
For weeks together,
The north's wet gloom
And the London fog —
All have offered the poet room

To build his saga, to court his dream
In the garret's chill,
On the star-roofed hill,
In the smudge of the hovel's peaty smoke,
Or to wander afoot in the path of the gleam
And visit the fairy folk.

"But what of the poems that wait such as he
Where my glamorous marshes go down to the sea?
Here is the poet's own place,
Where the salt creeks interlace,
Closed by the cloisters of vine and of oak
That chrismed the young bard's mouth
Whose spirit was clear to divine,
Whose flute was sweet to evoke
The notes, pure, crystalline,
That opened the song of my South?

"O musical souls from the northern land,
Who fled from your ancient mother
Foreboding what madness her portion would be
Who should rise, one day, to crush liberty

And to separate brother from brother; —
You have been faithful to me: —
Shall I fuse you with breath from the peaks that
stand
Gazing down on the foam of my sunset strand?

"When the gods were young,
And earth's matins were rung,
Full rudely young Siegfried's hunting-horn,
Staggered the toy Teutonic hills.
It were fitter, far, had his guiding Norn
Shewn him a more heroic bourne, —
Led the hero where yet there thrills
Through groves of a thousand Yggdrasils
The glow of the first California morn.

"And to-morrow, where icy Sierran towers
Chime my western Walhalla's hours,
Shall a greater than him of the Nibelung story
In music eternize my cycles of glory?
Shall flame to his singing a magic pyre
On deep-cleft Yosemite's mad, sheer verge?
Shall drift to him, over the undulant surge

Of the cataract-giants' tempestuous choir,
Rampings and rumblings of dragon ire,
The laugh of the daughters of dancing waters,
A swooping of Valkyrs, a sunset dirge
At the bier of a dusk-wrapped demiurge?

"Plain heroes and homespun saviors of old,
With the blood of your deep-hidden hearts of
gold
Shall I mingle the soul of a land like you? —
A land that can hide
The solemn pride
Of earth-heavens under its grass's blue?
And with these shall I mix the bold airs that
democracy best
Sings in the brotherly land where East meets
West?

"Far beneath furrow and wold,
Stygian river and hill
Hid in the breast of Kentucky, unfold
To the eye that is keen and the steadfast
will.

There is a city of wide-domed halls,
Colored and carved; the crusted walls
Bear frescoes flushed with the alpenglow,
Bear statues kin to the sculpture agleam
In the halls of the blessed when sculptors dream.
A marble temple is there
Whose white-robed pinnacles seem
Like choristers voicing a strain too rare
For the grosser ears of the world to share;
While the little, blind waterfall's tremulous
flow,
As it cheers the dim passage to Lethe's stream,
Startles the still oratorio.

"Great-heart Kentucky, whose common crust
Holds for my children such splendors in trust,
Ere your sun be set
Shall *you* beget
Some child of as deep-hearted likeness to you
As ever the land of Jeanne d'Arc knew?
Or, in caverns of sleep
As wild and deep
As the path of a meteor's earthward leap,

Shall you rouse from his inter-vital rest
Some Charlemagne of the waiting West?
Aye, Kentucky! And this were best:
That you fare but onward as you began
When you rocked on your gaunt and hollow breast
The deepest-hearted American!"

. . . . . .

But sudden remembrance darkens the eyes
Of America now, and her gladness dies.
Before and behind her a menacing foe
She beholds, and her singing falls sad and low:

"Alas! that visions like these
Fill not with the urge of creation
A happy, united nation.
Such are the dreams of peace; —
But the peace that was won in France
By the might of our swift advance
Proves but the dream of a day.
Like mist has it melted away.
My sons now gird them anew to fight
The armies of foes more dread,
Who, under banners of gold and of red,
Seek for my devastation.

"The golden enemy, day and night,
With jeweled gyves to manacle me,
And a diamond halter for Liberty,
Makes ready my van to attack,
Masking his bivouac
Where the smoke-shot, blinding glare of the mills
Throbs on the hideous Homestead hills,
And fathers at thirty are broken and grey,
And widows are minted every day;
Where tiny hands flash in a Southern loom
To finish a shroud for a hastening tomb;
And where, in the roots of the thick-branched town,
The pale slum-dwellers are trodden down
Like worms in the fetid dark
By the heel of the oligarch.
In many such place
Is fashioned a race
Blinder of soul, more noisome of breath,
Allied more desperately with death
Than old-world Cenci or bloody Macbeth.

"Behold, as I turn my face,
Behind me swarms the red foe.

His dim eyes, how should they know
From a foe to distinguish a friend?
Now what if my rear-guard fail,
And his blinded onset prevail?
Shall the marbles in Learning's hall
To the crash of his bludgeon bend?
From Beauty's time-sanctified wall
Shall his hand the loved tapestries rend? —
Aye! for he only knows that knowledge gave
Masters of men the power to make him a slave;
And he only knows that beauty of form and of hue
Lily-like out of the mire of his slavery grew.
So, like a banner, the red ranks raise
This cry to the blast of the Marseillaise:

> '*Into the bottomless pit be hurled*
> *Learning, the perfumed and Culture, the curled!*
> *Hand, not head, shall master the world!*'

"Thus, Janus-faced to a double foe,
How shall my phalanx the issue foreknow?
But, doubtful however the end may be,
Though sway the promise of victory

Hither and yon on fate's knees unsure,
Foeman, to this one word give ear:
Neither gilded ranks nor red do I fear.
Unlimber your golden guns;
Your murderous weapons uprear;
Honor at least is secure;
I have begotten me sons!

"I have stilled from the blood of the ages
An ichor to flow in their veins.
I have reared them on Sitka moraines,
Where valiant Niagara rages,
And Erie and Huron rest;
Where the portals of gold and of sand
Greet pilgrims from every land.
In forest and vision-filled plain,
By beauty-filmed chasm and crest,
I have mothered a brood which presages
That might and more might they shall gain,
The fiercer the battle-fire rain,
Till they win them eternity's wages
Who strive for my unity, blest.

"Already are mirrored stern joys
In eyes that understand
What struggles their valor await.
Already my gallant boys —
Like the farmers of Lexington's band,
Or the lads of the grim Argonne
Who, circled by death, drove on —
Catch up the weapon at hand, —
Bludgeon or bomb or knife —
And, vowing to win me a lofty fate,
Form for the hazard of death or life.

"Warded by legions like these, never shall I despair
Though rout be rolled upon rout and the issue desperate seem.
For, crushed, I care not how often, to earth, they shall rally and dare
Charge yet again in the van till victory crown them there.
And more than the victor's bay shall they bear to my crucible's glow —
The might of the struggle of struggles into its heart shall flow;

Out of its heart shall rise the strong new race of my dream,
Never to stay the advance till the folds of my standard gleam
On loftier heights of the soul, in a purer, more quickening air
Than ever the years have known. There the monarch of singers shall raise
To the lines of the Milton of morrows, the chords of my pæan of praise;
The heart of Kentucky shall hear me, — Lincoln's line shall increase, —
And Homestead hills shall rear me the Bonaparte of peace."

IV
OTHER POEMS

PARADISE REVISED

PLAYING hymn-tunes day and night
On a harp, *may* be all right
For the grown-ups; but for me
I do wish that Heaven could be
Sort o' like a circus, run
So a kid could have some fun!

There I'd not play harps, but horns
When I chased the unicorns:
Magic tubes with pistons greasy,
Slides that pushed and pulled out easy,
Cylinders of snaky brass
Where the fingers like to fuss,
Polished like a looking-glass,
Ending in a blunderbuss.

I would ride a horse of steel
Wound up with a ratchet-wheel.
Every beast I'd put to rout
Like the man I read about.

I would singe the leopard's hair,
Stalk the vampire and the adder,
Drive the werewolf from his lair,
Make the mad gorilla madder.
Needle-guns my work would do;
But, if beasts got closer to,
I would pierce 'em to the marrow
With a barbed and poisoned arrow,
Or I'd whack 'em on the skull
Till my scimiter was dull.

If these weapons did n't work,
With a kris or bowie-knife,
Poniard, assegai or dirk
I would make 'em beg for life;
Spare 'em, though, if they'd be good
And guard me from what haunts the wood:
From those creepy, shuddery sights
That come 'round a fellow nights:
Imps that squeak and trolls that prowl,
Ghouls, the slimy devil-fowl,
Headless goblins with lassoes,
Scarlet witches worse than those,

Flying dragon-fish that bellow
So as most to scare a fellow. . . .

There, as nearly as I could,
I would live like Robin Hood,
Taking down the mean and haughty,
Getting plunder from the naughty
To reward all honest men
Who should seek my outlaw's den.

When I'd wearied of these pleasures
I'd go hunt for hidden treasures, —
In no ordinary way:
Pirates' luggers I'd waylay;
Board 'em from my sinking dory,
Wade through decks of gore and glory,
Drive the fiends, with blazing matchlock,
Down below, and snap the hatch-lock.

Next, I'd scud beneath the sky-land,
Sight the hills of Treasure Island,
Prowl and peer and prod and prise,
Till there burst upon my eyes

Just the proper pirates' freight:
Gold doubloons and pieces of eight!

Then — the very best of all —
Suddenly a stranger tall
Would appear, and I'd forget
That we had n't ever met,
And with waving cap I'd greet him,
(Turning from the plunder yellow)
And I'd hurry hard to meet him,
For he'd be the very fellow
Who, I think, invented fun —
Robert Louis Stevenson.

LIMBS OF THE FOREST

Contours of milady's stocking,
Why are you so very shocking
  In the city? —
Though you gladden stream and wood
With luxuriant womanhood,
Giving not the least offenses
Even to a Grundy's senses,
  What a pity
That your symphony, in town,
Must be muffled by a gown!

And, milady's knickerbocker,
Why are you a shilling shocker
  In the city?
Though the forest finds your limbs
Decorous as a book of hymns, —
Finds your eloquence of line
Close akin to the divine?
  What a pity
Such a treat for poetry-lovers
Should be closed within cloth covers!

FOR THE GUEST-BOOK OF "THE CABIN" SUTTON'S ISLAND

(1910)

The glamour of Rothenburg towers,
Its tankards and quaint parasols,
The call of far Carcassonne hours,
And droll little Nuremberg dolls,

The charm of Tyrolean chisels,
Cool breaths from the land of the Finn,
Vesuvian sparkles and sizzles,
The stirring of shadows within

Lore-laden Ukrainian valleys,
The wheel of an old Hesperus,
Faint fragrance from lonely Swiss chalets: —
You bring these, dear Cabin, to us.

You add hearty welcome and laughter,
Talk, frolic or silence at need,

And a fare to tempt gods, — even after
Their meals of ambrosia and mead.

From Norway you bring us the mountains,
The red, craggy coast-line from Wales,
And Florida's youth-giving fountains,
And the soft, dreamy, delicate veils

Of Mediterranean distance, —
Have a care, little paradise, lest
You convince all your guests with insistence,
They've docked at the isles of the blest!

HAPPY MARRIAGE

Mistress Joy is at your side
Waiting to become a bride.

Soft! Restrain your jubilation.
That ripe mouth may not be kissed
Till you stand examination;
Mistress Joy 's a eugenist.

Is your crony Moderation?
Do your senses say you sooth?
Are your veins the kind that tingle?
Is your soul awake in truth?

If these traits in you commingle
Joy no more shall leave you single.

TO SLEEP

Hide me from echoes of turbulent streets;
  Of whitening breakers that gather and pour
  Crashing down on a crag-girt shore;
Of the bugle that brays and the drum that beats
To desperate charges and mad retreats;
  Of mills where clangorous anvils roar,
  And, loud to the pallid furnace door,
The bubbling steel God's wrath repeats.

But quiet me, rather, on your smooth breast,
  Sister Sleep, — and wrap me up
    With your warm, spiced veil, in a calm profound
As his who sinks to a well-earned rest,
  Kissing the rim of the infinite cup,
    Shadowed by love, by honor crowned.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

If this my pen
Has ever seemed to move aright
And faithfully indite
Words that have come from bournes beyond my ken, —
Give no more praise to me
Than should his portion be
Whose fingers, with a wondering delight,
Move among viol-strings
And seek to give again
The fruits of greater minds' imaginings, —
Music that is the dower of all men.

For I am only he
Who seeks again to give,
Without initiative,
The melodies that, far within his brain,
With joy that is half pain,
Sound echoed from the rapturous, distant song
Of festivals that to all time belong.

Alas! my halting pen
Never may purely give that song again.
Alas! the clownish hand
Whose fingers hover,
Fretting the string,
But powerless to recover
From music's wonderland
More than this harsher remnant-thing,
From what, — compact of Heaven's own dew and light
And murmurs of the bright,
The vast, harmonious, eternal main, —
The Lord of beauty set within this brain
For this my hand to echo how it can,
Crudely translating into coarser tone,
To sound above life's roar to every man,
Music no man may claim as his alone.

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